

HB5293 Will End Animal Education In Public Schools (There is no "Educator Exemption!")

2 messages

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Joint Committee on Environment Members and HB-5293 Sponsors,

Thanks for taking the time to read this. Before I start, I figure that I should briefly introduce myself and my company for some context.

My name is Michael Siavrakas, and I run a company which has specialized in the creation of living environments for animals since 2010. We are a supplier to dozens of AZA accredited zoos & museums, and many more schools & universities across the USA. Our design department has created live animal exhibits for respected institutions including the Museum of Natural History and others. We've worked with Connecticut's VOAG Education system, and their classes have benefited from our (**free**) in-person education in the past. We employ those with degrees in Captive Wildlife Care and Education, Environmental Science, and Zoology. Our CT business also proudly authored the #1 Google ranked articles on the topics of live vivarium design, vivarium lighting, and animal-specific care. To put it simply, we're veteran specialists in animal husbandry and habitat design.

This law (HB-5293) as it's written will prevent my experienced and well-qualified team from offering Animal Education Programs to public school students. HB-5293's explicitly listed Statement Of Purpose is "To prohibit the use of wild and exotic animals in traveling circuses." We agree wholeheartedly that travelling "Animal Circuses" are horrible, and would love to see them stopped. Unfortunately the bill as it's written will also **destroy animal education** in the state of Connecticut.

From what I've seen, lawmakers have suggested that there are "exemptions for animal educators", but that statement is misleading at best. The proposal only allows "AZA-accredited institutions" to offer animal education, which is a program for multi-million dollar Zoos and Museums with full time Zoological and Veterinary staff. In fact, those are just two of the *hundreds* of requirements in the [52-Page guide to AZA Accreditation](#). (Not to mention an \$8,000 filing fee + yearly fees!) To be direct: I don't know of a single travelling "animal educator" in the entire United States which has AZA accreditation, except for Zoos, Museums, and Aquariums with colossal budgets. **In reality, there is no exemption for animal educators in the current law.**

This "anti-circus" law would make it illegal for anyone but three Connecticut Zoos and Museums to teach kids in 1100+ CT schools about animals in person. As a father to a 5-year-old boy, I can confidently say that showing kids a Gecko, Frog, Lizard, or Tortoise in person will provide an exponentially more effective and memorable experience than just talking about them. Everyone at this company fondly remembers their in-class experiences with animal educators visiting their public schools. Maybe you remember too? Please don't pass HB-5293 as it's written. It will directly prevent kids from learning from experienced specialists about animals, their environments, and our changing world.

Thanks again for your time,
Michael Siavrakas



Michael Z Siavrakas
Owner + Chief Vivarium Nerd

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